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## MEETING NEEDS: A CALL FOR CHANGE

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The question to what extent graduates think their education enhanced their knowledge and abilities in various areas makes the educators wonder whether university missions are indeed fulfilling what they set out to do as there is increasing competition in the market today. The purpose of the paper is four fold; however, the main focus is to call for a change in outlook if there is university intention to be part of a more global world. Characteristics of successful university programs are identified, and new role definitions are outlined to call for a solution to the dilemma at hand. Reform recommendations are made. It is concluded that the universities of today must adopt an entrepreneurial approach if they are to fulfill their vision and role in society, serving and collaborating with the student, the work force and the community at large.

Educators are always making changes in their approaches to address issues of learning to meet the needs of students' as they are world citizens. As an educator in Lebanon, I call for the need to change the university objectives in Lebanon today to enable the making of such a world citizen. There exists the assumption that most higher education institutions uphold

the four academic missions: To educate and freely disseminate knowledge; to promote proficiency and ethics; to develop logic and creativity; and to provide an intellectually stimulating atmosphere.

If these were the objectives, then the answers to the four questions would result in positive answers. In general, they were not.

When graduates from various higher education institutions in Lebanon were asked "overall, how satisfied are you with your education?" The answers given showed that they were not. When asked "specifically, how satisfied were you with academic programs, student services and campus social life?" The answers given showed that they were not. When asked "to what extent did you think your education enhanced your knowledge and abilities in various areas -- including critical thinking, quantitative analyses, languages and appreciation of culture & the arts?" The answers showed that they did not think it did. Finally, when asked "if you had a chance to relive your university experience, would you choose the same institution again?" The answers showed that they probably would not.

The given perceptions tended to be more negative than positive. To better explore the negative nature of the perception, I have included some of the specific answers to the questions. On a positive note, one graduate stated that the university had taught him a lot of things he did not know or think about. Moreover, another graduate noted that the university had done a good job, but he was not able to find work in his field. On the negative side of perception, one graduate said that what they learnt in university was "soooo" different than what was done in the real world. He continued to say, that they had learnt a lot in the university, but they never really applied it. Another graduate noted that she always remembered her ethics instructor talking about the importance of honesty in business. However, she went on to say that what she found was that the more dishonest a person is in society, the better the chances of survival. She asked me to figure that out that paradox. Another graduate noted that although the laboratories at the university were well equipped, the experiments were too simple or unreal. Moreover, another noted that they never completed what they had started when they problem solved or discussed many of the cases although a lot of application work was done, a graduate stated, it was not realistic to what they found in the work world. More so, one graduate noted that although the instructors were taking the work that was assigned seriously, many times the students did not really concentrate and put their conscious effort into it to really focus on what they

were expected to do. Now, he noted, they realize the mistake, but at the time they were not motivated. One other graduate noted that sometimes, if not most of the times, they did things that were too detailed and irrelevant. They did it because they were being graded on it, but they did not know the purpose of the activity. Another graduate said that their instructors always brought in guest speakers – most of the time, she noted, the speakers really had not thought out the presentation plan. She believed that the presenters talked for the sake of talking. The students listened, but wondered if it was not just a publicity thing for the presenters. One recurrent answer was about theory and practice. Specifically, the graduates pointed out that doing theory and reading about the application of the information was not sufficient to make them ready to actually use the information themselves. Also, many noted that the tests did not really test their knowledge acquisition and understanding as much as the tests assessed their encoding ability.

The answers, based on results given by a sample of convenience, reinforce the perception that remains to be more negative than positive even though there is the continued and conscious effort on many educators' feasibility to change the ways.

My intention in this paper is not to be negatively critical or to paint a bleak picture. My intention is to expose the reality of the situation. It is important to note that Lebanon is not unique in this sense.

The dissatisfaction is present because of the element of awareness. On all levels of focus, there is awareness that the environment is complex. There is awareness that the environment is changing rapidly. Also, there is awareness that not all post education set-ups or work force mediums will suit all individuals. I strongly believe that satisfaction is a personal endeavor based on having individualized, personal needs met. Another reason dissatisfaction stems is from the awareness that the days or the period of time spent being educationally formed as students were not learner centered or learning based to meet the learners' and their differentiated development.

The awareness of such dissatisfactions is important. No matter where the dissatisfactions may stem from, I, nonetheless, believe that the university must be held responsible for the milieu. The increasing competition in global markets makes it imperative for education institutions to perform to the best of their capabilities. As Mason and Madden (1986) noted, "with worldwide competition, colleges must more aggressively respond to demand" (p. 20).

The West has adopted this philosophy, and I believe it is time that we too took this endeavor.

I also believe new demands have been placed on educators as the administrations of the institutions ask them to do their part in helping the organizations to stay competitive and responsible, yet the administrators do not feel the necessity to modify or to do their part or to make the change supportive. Many educators are willing to make the needed changes, yet there is awareness that the administrators do not feel the need. This cannot be the stance. In 1982, Kuntz noted that "for executives in the world of business to consider themselves as professionals, they must realize that changes in economy, technology, law and accounting requires that they never stop learning" or implementing supportive change. Does this not put pressure on education institutions to make or accommodate the needed changes in perception?

The purpose of paper is fourfold. The first purpose is to reinforce that systems as they stand today have value in enabling students to acquire basic knowledge. The second purpose is to acknowledge that basic knowledge does not stand-alone; it must be coupled with applied knowledge. The third purpose is to show that there is a need for change in outlook if there is intention to be part of a more global world – national or international in flavor. The fourth purpose is to show that good communication is key to success. It must be concise and focused and thorough (Jacobs, 1998).

I believe that there must to be the recognition and the readiness to implement a need for change in outlook. The focus needs to be on making eight major changes. The main change has to do with a creation of a new philosophy (eg. Barrett, 2002; Luby, 1996). This new philosophy is not to be a mission statement that describes what the educational institution intends to do. The new philosophy is to advance a vision. A vision clearly denotes a purpose or a guiding philosophy. This, then, will pave the way for the second needed change: The development of goals or objective to meet demands of the new philosophy. The third change has to do with the change in roles. Specifically, this focus should aim to describe the active role of university in the preparation of the new student. The university must clearly recognize the need for quality resource availability, be it – to name a few – the library, the specialized staff, the faculty, the advisors, the student services. The fourth change that is needed is the change in curricula (Heisler & Lasher, 1986; Kuntz, 1982). The fifth has to do with modification or

changes in course set-ups. The sixth has to do with change in methodologies. The seventh focus would be on redefining role of the educator (Heisler & Lasher, 1986), and the eighth key focus would be on creating the student in a new role. To accomplish this outcome, all seven changes must be actively undertaken paving the way to successfully create the new learner.

Certain facts must be noted. The literature on educational reform acknowledges that the best preparation for a career is a general college education (Anonymous, 1979). However, it is also fast to point out that a college education does not guarantee success in any profession, but it is a step in right direction. Another important fact the literature notes is that a job interview is the best chance for the students or prospective employees to impress recruiters with an understanding of customs, ethics, knowledge, and problem solving skills (Tanaka, 1995). Given those two facts, the challenge, as I see it, is to increase effectiveness of faculty, curricula and operations of the whole educational set up as suggested above to ensure that it parallels the acculturated needs and operations of real world organizations. This, I believe will lay the grounds for our tertiary educational institutions in Lebanon or the Middle East to create the successful endeavor of functionally placing the graduates in the global world of competition.

If one considers what makes leading tertiary institutes of higher education in the United States successful and compares them to what the Third world may work with, I note that it is plausible to execute if there is a willingness to realize a vision. The leading schools or programs have been identified to have many of the following 15 characteristics (Wen-Jang Jih, 2003; Alsop, 2001; Thompson, 1993). Listed in no particular order, the schools or programs:

- Have small programs.
- Have small classes.
- Have specialized activities or in-depth curricula.
- Have emphasis on e-commerce, IT.
- Have increased use of multimedia resources.
- Develop skills to use, create and evaluate the technologies available in the field.
- Develop team work.

- Have analytical and problem solving skills building.
- Focus on international perspectives.
- Have a strong background in ethics.
- Develop a job preparation course.
- Have simulations created in-class to parallel work environment preparation.
- Have intern programs with the option to remain or become an employee in the company.
- Focus on increasing quantitative and qualitative skills acquisition with the integration of the skills into functional areas, and
- Develop original and visionary thinking

Moreover, the students in such environments accommodate and are created in ways that are versatile, resourceful, multitalented, and multidisciplinary. They have the ability to communicate orally and in writing and to use interpersonal skills. They acquire guided work experience where there are hands-on trial work period opportunities. They are molded in a way to have leadership potentials, to show that they are able to work with group spirit, able to communicate and collaborate with others. Furthermore, the students show confidence in their ability to use fundamental skills and to take risks. They are part of a well-rounded student body.

The role of the university is to give direction and counsel. The university is expected to train their faculty to become mentors of learning as well as stimulators and motivators, organizers, mediators between the teaching/learning aids and the students, facilitators of instruction, and resource consultants. The university is expected to encourage and support the students in their learning. More so, the university is expected to be committed to the students; to the educator peers; to the system of teaching/learning set up; the university is expected to be committed to the vision. The university is expected to evaluate curricula and student work to ensure appropriate promotion of information.

To this avail there must be a call to face the dilemma that such a set up to a certain extent is nonexistent in such idealism. I believe there must be a call for the university to know that it is not only to be a reservoir of knowledge to facilitate acquisition of knowledge, but also to become learner-centered in its

philosophy of education. I believe there must be a call for a sort of quality management approach to the set up as the university mission stands. I believe there must be a call for strategic planning. The planning should be a slow process since there must be careful study and evaluation of the present to propose a direction of the vision. This cannot and should not be made haphazardly.

I call for the possibility of advancing at least eight possible solutions to implement.

First and foremost, there must be a call for the right outlook to lead towards overall educational objectives. Creating opportunities within the environment for skill acquisition and improvement best does this.

A second solution to create opportunities to enhance such skill acquisition is to have hands on experience. Since it is often said that the universities have difficulty in providing sufficient and efficient practical experience in the field (eg. Lacey & Licht, 1980), there is call for a lot of career related or oriented work experience early in university years (eg. Mulcahy, 1999). The solution is to culminate efforts together. Thus, the students, the faculty, the staff and the professionals in the real work field collaborate to best meet the needs of the time to turn out the needed type of student.

A third call for a solution is to train or recruit faculty to take responsibility to empower the students. I believe it is possible to recruit retired professionals to bring with them to the teaching environment the experience acquired in the professional world (Illman, 1993).

A fourth solution to the present dilemma is to have the students take responsibility for their own learning. Students have expectation that the institutions of higher learning are responsible to educate and failure to do so lies mainly on the institutions and not on the failure of the students themselves to take part in the endeavor to acquire the needed knowledge and practice. I believe that the accommodation process, although linear, is two-way and feeds on mutual respect and growth. The university set up should, I believe, empower the students to take responsibility for their own learning. However, I believe to do so it must first prepare the students for such a role.

This leads me to what is my fifth call for a solution: The need to prepare the students. The educational institutions must set up learner-centered opportunities. Take, as one example, the library as a center to provide



learning environments (Rockman, 2002). The library should be a key campus resource. It should work closely and creatively with the educational body, and consistently aid the educators and the students to achieve goals and objectives successfully. At the same time, it should ensure that they maintain a visible stance and provide or stimulate intellectual discourse.

A sixth solution to the present dilemma is to call for the educational set up to reassess, reevaluate, and restructure curricula. It is important to look at the ways of the past, the present and the future (Gross, 1993; Levinson, 1987; Aggarwal & Khera, 1978). The call to restructure may be on the level of general requirements, department requirements, and/or core requirements (Harrison, 2003; Heisinger & Conzen, 1999). The curricula should be restructured in a manner to be both structured and unstructured. The structured part of the curricula, for example, may incorporate lectures, cases, group work, and the unstructured part, for example, may provide hands on experiences and research building opportunities (Lacey & Licht, 1980). The purpose in restructuring the curricula is to improve or increase the communication skills program. The program strengths, I believe is to focus primarily on three levels. There is to be more focus on oral, written communication, and technical fluency both in class and work-related settings; there is to be leadership development; and there is to be individual and team collaboration, with confidence building through mentoring, integrated team instruction and assessment (Harrison, 2003; Slater, et al., 1995). Most programs today teach courses through an integrated learning approach using the aid of team instruction. This is what I believe Lebanon's education system needs to adopt as essential to implementing constructive change.

I believe that the seventh action solution is to call for a well-designed and well-executed collaborative action of the part of the educators and professionals in the present work sectors (Horwitz, 2001; Davidson, 1999; Borland, et al., 1991; Wills, 1991; Levy, 1987; Cooper, 1979). Over and above that, I call for the use of the working world to become a learning lab.

Then, the eighth solution to the present dilemma is to literally call to use the real world as "learning labs". The West has done it; why should the east not do so, creating opportunities to use ex-patriotic businesses as grounds to explore and implement theory in practice? The internships may be provided in a number of different ways to suit the individual or institutional needs. The internships may be blocked into many hours, may be long term

rotations, may be simultaneously and periodic to correspond to curricula development. The internship type needs to be developed based on a purpose (eg. Mouche, 2001; Mulcahy, 1999; Gardner & Schmit, 1996; Calise, 1992; Wills, 1991; Robinson & Courter, 1989; Postma, 1987). I believe that if the purpose is to develop job related skills and talent, there is a need for the mentoring experience to be continuous. The intern and the work partner collaborate together. There should be an identification period to classify knowledge base and skills the intern has to, then, develop a plan of action over time for growth possibility. I believe that there should be opportunity for practical work based learning to take place sufficiently to build confidence is using the knowledge base being acquired at the university (Horwitz, 2001). Another possibility is to develop work based learning programs (Garnett, 2001; Gregg & Wirt, 1996). In this realm, there is created partnerships to minimize deficits and discrepancies that may be found in the students' learning curves and the educators' teaching strategies.

A popular program in the West today is the school to work program (Neumark & Joyce, 2001; Grossman, 1997; Szabo, 1992). I believe there is value even in creating such a program for the institutions in Lebanon. The program aims to reinforce the value of education received so far and links it to the real world functioning. It may actual take place in the "real world or through simulation possibilities (Copple & Lee, 1998).

I believe providing the students with opportunities of growth are essential in creating the confident learner and survivor in the globalized world. The aim to using to using the real world as "learning labs" is to give students temporary jobs to engage in hands-on real life problem solving situations. They work, they consult, they research, and they innovate (Fontenot & Rainsford, 1993). This may also provide them with the opportunity of future employment with in the same company due to the exposure (Mouche, 2001). One other aim may be to have the students in the work force develop innovative technology which may prove to be skill, knowledge, and expertise worthy to enable the set up of "free enterprise" programs. For example, IBM offers such opportunities for students to join and advance their creations (Tischelle, 2002). In a "free enterprise" program, the students have the environments to develop, argue and acquire recognition for proposal projects worth investment by companies (Howell, 1999). The students may receive patents, copyrights, and cash remuneration for their ideas. Also many institutes of work or of education provide the students with laptop computers, with internet access to enable collaborative work to be

done, to enable them to check on work assignments, course material, etc (Scott, 2001).

I believe there are two other valuable purposes that come out of having the real world used as a "learning lab". The first other valuable purpose, I believe, is that it is key to providing the students with integrated team instruction. The team is taught, the team teaches, the team contributes interdisciplinary exchange and the team project manages. Second, I believe it is valuable in that it prepares the students for the job related interview when the students apply for a job. Creating a course that deals with business communication is important (Robinson & Courter, 1989), but it is very important that students get exposed to simulation and real life interview set ups to better prepare them for the actual job related interview. In the preparation of students for an interview, it is important for them to learn the common behavioral methodologies for them to integrate into their unique selling points during the actual interview situation (Akhras-Sabieh, 2000c; Jacobs, 1998; Tanaka, 1995; Kohn, 1975). This is acquired within the skill development endeavors the students acquire through real world labs, simulations, role playing, real life experiences, and critical thinking strategy building class and work opportunities and pre-interview learning sessions (Akhras-Sabieh, 2000a; 2000b; Copple & Lee, 1998; Broadbent, 1994; Ilaw, et al., 1985)

If these are the possible solutions to the present dilemma, what is it that is hoped will be accomplished? What are the outcomes or the expected achievements? I believe that in proposing the solutions as such there will be created a more relevant knowledge-action-competence model of teaching/learning – a new paradigm to set up a more realistic practical vision. I expect this new prototype to have in it strategy building and problem solving acquisition skills. I expect this new model to promote less anxious students and create more empowered confident students. I expect this new exemplar to help students understand difficulties and frustrations within their worlds of focus to create citizens for national and international survival by producing student partnering with their universities, fields and communities.

In conclusion, the call I am making to have the university education systems reform is to guarantee the graduates' survival in the work force. To do so, and in support of Gross (1993), the students must be "multifaceted

professionals and their education must support this diversity". The education system must become entrepreneurial in nature.

As long as the "universities have intellectual and social purpose, their role is to foster creativity and responsiveness to change. Creativity is required for there to be innovation, where innovation is the commercialization of ideas and change to existing systems and services. The real test of an innovation lies in its success in the marketplace. Entrepreneurial organizations value and nurture innovations because this is the key to ensuring adaptability. Therefore, it is argued that universities need to adopt an entrepreneurial approach if they are to fulfill their mission and role in society" (Grigg, 1994, p. 273).

I believe that the keys to such adoption are the educators. Gandolfi (2000) noted that the educators "... teach not only a subject or a class, but also valuable lessons that may not be understood until later in life". I believe the role of the educators is to mentor and guide along the students' path of educational theory and practice acquisition (eg. Bukics, 1995). This is so, for, in accordance with William Yeats, "education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire" Thus, for the educational environment to light the fire, there is an expectation to meet the needs, to call for change and to reform not only in vision but in actual practice. To the best of my knowledge, one institution in Lebanon has done so; I applaud it and hope that the rest of the educational institutions in Lebanon undertake a similar vision, a route, to that of the *International Arts Academy*.

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